

Making Progress in 2007
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the Carmel Valley News, December 2006

As the year comes to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the progress that has been made this year in restoring the City's fiscal health and returning our focus to neighborhood services.

Much of 2006 has been spent setting up our new form of government, and establishing the proper roles and responsibilities for our two branches of government.

This year has also seen some major milestones for the City, including the completion of the Audit Committee report, the launching of a series of fundamental financial reforms and a settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission. All of this has laid the groundwork for us to make an enormous amount of progress in 2007.

Here are a few things I am committed to bringing forward to council next year:

Keep police on the street: Issues surrounding public safety remain one of the council's top priorities. We must negotiate competitive salary and benefits for public safety members. As I have said many times, officers aren't leaving San Diego because the weather is better in Chula Vista. It costs the city up to \$100,000 to train an SDPD recruit. If we want to hold on to that investment, we must remain competitive with other local departments. Let's not be penny-wise and pound-foolish by allowing ourselves to become the training ground for other police departments. Members of the public safety class may have to be treated differently than regular city employees, and we must expedite our retention plan to slow down the number of police officers leaving the city.

Straight-forward budgeting: In order for us to pay our police and fire fighters the salaries they deserve and to fund the other services our neighborhoods depend on, such as parks and libraries, the mayor and the City Council need to be realistic about the true cost of services. If we are going to budget for a service, it must have an adequate and sustainable revenue source. I believe the City Council has the duty to be responsible to the taxpayers by approaching funding and budgeting decisions in a way that is realistic but fair. One way the city can monitor the true cost of services is through the mayor's 5-year budget plan, the first presentation of which should come before the City Council by the end of the year. This will allow us to anticipate fluctuations in revenue and expenses, and make informed decision before problems arise.

Continue progress on clean water issues: While the city has made tremendous progress in decreasing sewer spills -- 80 percent since 2000 -- the city must make further improvements to sewer and water pipes and replace aging storm drain in order to comply with federal and state regulations in the near future. The mayor's 5-year financial forecast must include proper cost structures to pay for all water, storm water and sewer upgrades. These improvements will benefit the city financially as well as environmentally, since the city will be able to avoid fines imposed for violations of state and federal clean-water laws.

Keep the Chargers in San Diego County: This year, the city agreed to work with the county to keep the San Diego Chargers in San Diego County. Regardless of which city hosts the actual stadium, the economic and civic benefits of a professional football team benefit our entire region. This year, we should settle on a plan that's responsible to taxpayers and, perhaps in 2008, put the plan to a public vote. Recently the San Francisco 49ers announced plans to build a new stadium in Santa Clara, a neighboring city. We could see a similar move here, if the Chargers make an agreement with National City. I support such an agreement and will help to facilitate it.

Citizen participation in making progress toward these goals is vital. I invite you to join us at the City Council as we address these and other important issues in 2007.